

Solomont, national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Dan Dutko, chair, Victory Fund; and comedians Judy Gold and Carolyn Rhea.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Miami

December 11, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Buddy, for giving me the chance to come here today to get your campaign kicked off and to repay in some small way the great obligation of friendship I feel for you for—as I said today at Buddy’s fundraiser—for being for me in late 1991, before the Florida straw poll, before anything happened, and when only my mother felt I could be elected President. Buddy was there. And I’m glad to be here for him tonight. Mayor, thank you so much for what you said and for the vigor and youth and energy of your leadership and the enormous promise of your future. I’ve loved being with you today, and I wish you well. And I cannot thank Chris and Irene enough. I was looking at this—you know, I knew farmers back in Arkansas that didn’t have ponds this big—[*laughter*—to feed hundreds of head of cattle. I am so—I love this place, and you’ve made us all feel so much at home. And at the end of a very long day, it’s wonderful to be here. I’d like to thank Governor Romer and Alan Solomont and Dan Dutko for coming down for the Democratic Party. I would like to thank not only Chris but also Gene Prescott and Mitch Berger for helping us tonight.

Some of you were at the other place, and I’ll try not to give the same speech twice—although I am reminded of—maybe that’s what I should do. One night I was at a concert by Tina Turner, one of my favorite political philosophers. [*Laughter*] And Tina Turner—it was about 10 years ago; she was just making her big comeback, you know, after she told a story about how Ike did her wrong and everything. She had all these new songs and she had that great saxophone player who was a bodybuilder and has chains all over his body. If you’re a Tina Turner fan, you’ve probably seen him. So anyway, so we had the concert and she sings all these new songs and they’re all real good. And then at the

end of the concert, the band starts playing the introductory bars to “Proud Mary,” which was her first hit. So she moves up to the microphone, and the crowd goes nuts. And they start screaming and cheering and she backs off and then she taunts them again and moves up and the crowd screams again. And she goes up to the microphone and says, “You know something, I’ve been singing this song for 25 years, but it gets better every time I do it.” [*Laughter*] So maybe I should just give the same talk. [*Laughter*]

Let me say, in 1991, when I decided to leave a job I loved and a State I loved and embark on the Presidency, I did it because I was afraid our country was moving into a new century and a new era without a strategy that would make everybody be a part of America and that in the end would not have America be as strong as it ought to be. I felt that the political debate in Washington was stale and often irrelevant and too infused with an impulse to personal destruction. There’s still a lot of that there, by the way—[*laughter*—one reason I kind of hate to go back tonight.

But the main thing I thought was that we were just thinking in yesterday’s framework. And I still believe that’s what was wrong. And so I went to the Democrats in the primary process, and I said, “Look, I want to do something different. I don’t want us to abandon our values, but I want us to take a new direction based on the time we’re living in and in the time toward which we’re going—a global economy, a global society, an information and technology revolution. All the patterns of how we live and work and relate to each other and the rest of the world is subject to change. I want us to focus on the future, not the past; on doing things that help everybody, not just a few people; and on promoting unity, not division. There’s enough division in this country. And I want the Government to be neither the savior, nor sit on the sidelines, but instead to focus on a clear mission which is to create the conditions and give people the tools to make the most of their own lives.” And that’s what we’ve been doing for 5 or 6 years now—5 years really, since I’ve been President, and the results have been pretty satisfactory.

And I think when the issue is whether you should support the Democratic Party or whether you should support Buddy MacKay or whether you should keep helping me and our crowd do what we're trying to do, you just need to know that everything that I do and everything I try to see that our party stands for, I try to make sure that we're thinking of everyone, not just a few; that we're promoting unity, not just division; and we're committed to the future, not the past.

There's still a lot out there to do. I'm glad we've got the lowest unemployment rate and the lowest crime rates in 24 years and the biggest drop in welfare in history and a gazillion other impressive things I could say. We still have to prove that we can grow the economy and do what it takes to preserve the planet. We still have to prove that we can provide for our parents, in terms of health care and retirement, save for our own retirement, and preserve Social Security and Medicare in a way that doesn't bankrupt our children.

You know, I'm the oldest of the baby boomers, and I'm increasingly mindful of that. I guess I'm what you call near-elderly. [Laughter] And when our crowd retires and we all get into the ranks of the retired, those of us who get there have a life expectancy up in the eighties somewhere. And there will be only a little more than two people working for every one of us that's retired. We have a moral obligation now, while I'm still in office, to try to figure out how to preserve Social Security and how to preserve Medicare, indeed, how to make sure other people who don't have access to retirement that's sufficient to support their lifestyle can save more for their own retirement and afford to keep getting health care in a way that doesn't bankrupt our kids. Now, can we do that? Of course we can. But we have to do it. We still can't say with a straight face that every American child without regard to their race, their income, or their station in life has access to world-class education. And until we can, we can't secure the future of this country.

Those are just three big issues. If you look around the world, there's a lot of fear in America apparently about expanding trade. I think it's a mistake—a third of growth comes from selling more things to other peo-

ple. If we've got 4 percent of the world's people and 20 percent of the world's wealth, we can't keep our income unless we sell something to the other 96 percent. On the other hand, you have to be sympathetic to American workers who figure that more and more and more what they say, feel, or think doesn't matter, that their whole pattern of existence can be wiped away in an instant by people who aren't accountable to anybody and not loyal to any country. That's the sort of negative of an emerging global economy. So what do we have to do? We have to find a way to get the benefits of trade and preserve the social compact. We can't protect people from economic change, because economic change is bringing a lot of benefit to a lot of people. But when people lose and they're still good people and they're willing to show up for work in the morning, we need to move more quickly to help them get the training they need, the skills they need, the future they need.

So there's plenty left to do. And that's why you're here, and that's why I believe the Democrats are the right party to do it, as I said at the earlier event. The two seminal decisions that were taken in 1993 and 1994 that have had a big impact on this country every day since was, first, the economic plan, which got no Republican votes, which had reduced the deficit by 92 percent by the time we adopted the balanced budget law; and second, the crime bill, which was bitterly opposed by the Republicans because the NRA didn't like it because we had the Brady bill, the assault weapons ban, 100,000 more police, and preventive programs for kids.

But those are the strategies that are working in community after community after community throughout the country to lower the crime rate. In the work we're doing with the Republicans when we work together, I think our party makes a unique contribution. Both caucuses voted for the balanced budget. It was a remarkable document. The Republicans had a slightly higher percentage of House Members voting for it than the Democrats did. The Democrats had a higher percentage of Senators voting for the balanced budget than the Republicans did. But over two-thirds of both voted for it.

What did we give to that? First of all, we gave them 92 percent of the work. It's a lot easier to balance the budget and spend more money if you're almost home. But secondly, we said, now is the time to provide health insurance to the children of working parents who can't afford it. And they said, okay, and we did it. And we said, now is the time to give parents tax credits, not only for their children at home but for the cost of college tuition for all 4 years and graduate school and for people who lose their own jobs or are underemployed and have to come back. So we make a difference. And if you look at those challenges out there, they matter.

The last point I want to make is this—I said this before at the other thing, and I want to say this to you—I have taken a lot of good-natured ribbing and sometimes outright criticism by commentators for being a notoriously personal President, for being interested in individuals that I know and telling a lot of stories and seeing politics with a very human and highly individualized face, even if I'm just working a crowd. I have vivid memories of people I have met in crowds all my life and the stories they've told.

But the truth is, a nation is nothing much more or less than the sum of its stories. There was a report on one of the television networks the other night, a wonderful report about the State of Tennessee reviving the art of storytelling. Did any of you see that? They actually are now having an annual storytelling contest in Tennessee and bringing in all of these people out from the hills and these rural areas and letting people tell their stories and letting other people listen to them.

Mayor Penelas told me the story of his parents tonight—told me how much it meant to his mother to come to the Inauguration. He said that tonight would be her birthday if she were still with us, talked to me about his father. I don't know about you, but I think he does a better job as mayor every day because he respects his parents' roots, his parents' values, loves them when they're here and when they're gone, and they're part of the story of his life.

Every one of you has got a story to tell. That's what I try to tell people that work for me in the White House: Don't forget, every person you ever come in contact with has

got a story. It deserves to be respected, and you can learn something from it. This country is still around here after 220 years plus because people got a chance to live their dreams, and the stories got better generation after generation. And it will be here 220 years from now if we do our job to form a more perfect Union, to pull us closer together, and to meet the challenges of tomorrow. That is the job of every generation of Americans, but it begins by appreciating the absolute integrity of every person's life and every person's right to dream and giving everybody that chance at the brass ring. That's why I'm still a Democrat and why I expect to die one and why I hope between now and then I can convert a lot of others.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Chris and Irene Korge. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Indictment of Henry G. Cisneros

December 11, 1997

Henry Cisneros has a distinguished career of truly dedicated public service. As mayor of San Antonio, as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and as a wise counselor to me, he always has the interest of ordinary people at heart. I have greatly valued his service. This is a matter before the courts, so it is not appropriate for me to comment further.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

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The President had separate telephone conversations with Presidents Fidel Ramos of